



Family Session: B-Mitzvah: Today You Are An Adult: What Does It Mean to Become A Teen?

[▶ curriculum.movingtraditions.org/family-session-b-mitzvah-today-you-are-an-adult-what-does-it-mean-to-become-a-teen](https://curriculum.movingtraditions.org/family-session-b-mitzvah-today-you-are-an-adult-what-does-it-mean-to-become-a-teen)



Objectives:

- Participants will understand the experience of becoming a b-mitzvah as becoming a teenager and becoming the parent of a teenager
- Participants will be able to articulate their family's and community's values around the b-mitzvah experience
- Parents and preteens will explore what they are excited about and nervous about in relation to the preteen's b-mitzvah

Sample Invitation Text:

Prior to the session we recommend sending this to parents ahead of time so that they know what to expect and are prepared for the session. Please modify as needed for your community:

Hello!

Our synagogue has chosen to partner with Moving Traditions (curriculum.movingtraditions.org) to pioneer a new approach to b-mitzvah. The Moving Traditions family education and preteen sessions we will be running connect Jewish wisdom to the inter-personal and social elements that come with the coming of age ritual. The Moving Traditions sessions aim to help you and your preteen think beyond the bimah or celebration and focus on the core questions of what it means to become a teenager today and what it means to become the parent of a teenager. In order to help you and your child think about this, we look forward to seeing you for our interactive family workshop for preteens/teens and adults, called “Today You Are An Adult: What Does It Mean To Become a Teen?”

(INSERT MEETING LOCATION, DATE, START TIME AND END TIME AS WELL AS ANYTHING YOU NEED THEM TO BRING)

Materials:

- Speakers for playing music and a screen if you choose to use video
- Handouts:
 - Text Study-Yehuda ben Teima and Pirkei Lanu (Print one copy per participant)
 - Student Handout: (Print one per student; to be used in student breakout group)
- Pens for each participant
- Markers
- Large Chart Paper
- Participant Survey: Text the word MITZVAH from their phone to **267-399-5900**
- Choose which option you are going to do for the student activity:
 - Blown up balloons or Beach Balls (two per student participant) and a permanent marker for each student
 - OR four apples per student (watch this [video](#) for a demonstration of the activity)

1. Introduction (15 minutes)

Play some typical b-mitzvah celebration music as folks walk in. If you have a disco light, add it to the mix!

Welcome participants to the family session with excitement.

SAY:

We are so excited to have you come together to begin thinking about this important moment in the life of your family. This session was written by an organization called Moving Traditions and we are one of more than 80 congregations that have partnered with them across the country this year. As you will see, Moving Traditions wants to help you as a family think about b-mitzvah in the context of what it means to become a teen – the title of this session – and what it means to become the parent of a teen. We hope that what we do today will help you have honest and thoughtful conversations about what b-mitzvah means to you, and open new avenues of empathy and understanding. So, let's begin!

Facilitator's Tip: There are various ways to conduct this "barometer" activity and you should choose the one you feel most comfortable with.

1. Label one side of the room "agree" on the other side "disagree." Instruct participants to move towards whichever one in their answer or invite them to stand somewhere in between.
2. Tell participants that holding up a full hand, with all five fingers means agree and that holding up a closed fist means disagree. Explain they can also choose to hold up 1, 2, 3, or 4 fingers indicating their level of agreement.
3. Ask participants line up in one long line facing you. Then, explain that if they agree with your statement, they should take five steps towards you. If they disagree, they can stay on the line and if they feel in between, they can choose to take 2, 3 or 4 steps forward.

SAY:

For different families, having a b-mitzvah is exciting and stressful in different ways. I am going to read a series of statements. The statements will have to do with your family. They are meant to elicit your personal opinion, but do not worry, they will not be too personal. We are not asking anyone to judge anyone else. And parents and their own students should feel free to disagree with each other! (Explain how they indicate agree or disagree based on which option you chose above.)

There are no right or wrong answers and all opinions are welcome!

Read the following statements:

Facilitator's Tip: There are many prompts here. You may want to read them beforehand and choose which ones you will "pause" on, allowing people to speak with one another or to the entire group in response to the prompt.

Prompts:

1. This is the first b-mitzvah of a child in our immediate family.
2. We've spent a lot of time together talking about or planning the b-mitzvah.
3. The weekends in our family are very busy.
4. In our family, there is a show that we all watch together.
5. In our community, it seems like there are some differences between the way that most people celebrate a bar mitzvah and the way that most people celebrate a bat mitzvah.
6. There is something in the b-mitzvah process that I am excited about.
7. There is something in the b-mitzvah process that I am nervous about.

8. The b-mitzvah we are planning has been impacted by our experiences during the pandemic

SAY:

Now that we have seen the diversity among families and the various joys and stresses we all experience, we are going to shift gears and talk more about the b-mitzvah experience.

2. Becoming a Teenager: Text Study 1 (20-30 minutes)

DISTRIBUTE Rabbi Yehudah ben Teimah handout to all participants.

Have everyone read the following text from Rabbi Yehudah ben Teimah. If you have a group that likes to read, have volunteers read it aloud. If you want to turn it into a quick drama, break the 14 ages listed in the text up into “parts” and have 14 different people read them aloud.

SAY:

Two thousand years ago, this was the Jewish path of life. It starts with education and then it goes on to other topics.

Yehudah ben Teima used to say: Five years is the age for the study of scripture, Ten is the age for the study of Mishnah, Thirteen is the age for observing the mitzvot, Fifteen is the age for the study of Talmud, Eighteen is the age for the wedding canopy, Twenty is the age for pursuit, Thirty is the age for full strength, Forty is the age for understanding, Fifty is the age for giving counsel, Sixty is the age for mature age, Seventy is the age for a grey head, Eighty is the age for superadded strength, Ninety is the age for a bending stature, One hundred is the age at which one is as if dead, passed away, and ceased from the world.

– Pirkei Avot, 2nd century, Israel

ASK:

Once you have read the text, go back and look at ages 13, 15, and 18. Why, do you think, would they have these specific ages and stages when everything after them is by decade? What is significant about these three ages beyond what is in the text? (*Possible answers include: It shows how important the teen years really are, there is significant growth developmentally in this time period, it's when we go through the most physical changes, etc.*)

SAY:

Even in this text we see how big of a deal the teen years really are!

Now we are going to write our own life stages based on Yehudah ben Teima's formula. (Pass out pens or pencils)

What do you think five is the age for in today's world? What do five years olds do? What about 10? You will work in small groups and come up with your own modern-day version of this text. Again, there are no right or wrong answers to this!

Facilitator's Tip: An optional way to adapt this activity is to have participants fill out the worksheet thinking about a particular lens/theme. For instance, what do five year olds, 10 year olds, 13 year olds... like to do on a Sunday morning? What is each age group ready for, from a technological perspective (i.e. 10 is the age for cell phones, 13 is the age for Instagram).

Pirkei Lanu—In Our Community:

We say: Five years is the age for _____.

Ten is the age for _____.

Thirteen is the age for _____.

Fifteen is the age for _____.

Eighteen is the age for _____.

Twenty is the age for _____.

Thirty is the age for _____.

Forty is the age for _____.

Fifty is the age for _____.

Sixty is the age for _____.

Seventy is the age for _____.

We recommend having them do this in small groups, parent(s)/child together with one other parent(s)/child from another family. Tell them to make sure that the ideas of parents and students are in the group's responses. Give participants 10 minutes to fill out the worksheet and share with one another.

When everyone is done, review the ages, asking for volunteers to share what they wrote on their sheets.

Facilitator's Tip: You can also ask for two volunteers to come up to the front of the room for a set of the ages and do a speed round where you ask each person to give an answer as quickly as possible. Person one says what 40 is the age for and then person two does. Then you ask age 50 and they do the same thing, etc.

SAY:

In some cases, our answers are not so far off from Yehuda Ben Teima. In other cases, our answers are very different. What does this that say about the way in which our modern world has not changed/What does it say about the ways in which it has changed?

3. Child, Teen, Adult (20 minutes)

Prep: Put up three large pieces of poster paper around the room, one labeled “child,” the second labeled, “teen,” and the third labeled, “adult.”

Introduce the topic with this quick discussion:

SAY:

It used to be that most b-mitzvah kids would say, “Today I am a man,” or “Today I am a woman.” As we just heard in the Yehuda Ben Teima text, long ago, people got married in their early teens, so age 13 represented an age of more advanced maturity than it does today. Today, the rite of passage still marks an end of childhood. But today, we understand that what you are becoming is not an adult but a teen. We are going to explore what it means to become a teenager and how people view teenagers. To do this, we will start with the emerging teens and hear their ideas of what teenagers are all about.

Ask the students in the room first to call out words associated with the life stages “child” You might phrase this as:

When you hear child, what words or phrases come to mind?

Jot down the words they say.

Then ask the adults to tell you what phrases come to their minds and jot those down on the same chart paper.

Repeat this with “Teen” and “Adult.” For example, “When you hear teen, what words or phrases come to mind?” and, “When you hear adult, what words or phrases come to mind?”

Facilitator’s Tip: If participants get stuck coming up with the phrases, suggest that they think about what adults/teens/children think about, feel, and do.

Facilitator’s Tip: If parents end up sharing mostly negative words/phrases around the word “teen” encourage them to think of a specific teen in their life or do one of the following:

Walk over to a parent and ask them “what’s your teen’s name?” Ask them to provide 2-3 adjectives that describe THEIR child. They will without a doubt, list wonderful qualities. Repeat with another family or two. Reflect back to the group that even though the list we generated about teens has some negative adjectives, each individual teen is special and wonderful. Or, ask each family turn to look at one another and ask parents to share something special about their teen. Ask them to hold these special words with them as they enter this next phase of life

ASK:

1. What themes did you notice on each flipchart page? Themes for “Child” responses? Themes for “Teen” responses? Themes for “Adult” responses? (make sure you get student responses in addition to parent responses.)
2. What surprised you about the responses on each of these pages?
3. Students, how does it feel to see “Teens” described as (pick two or three of the negative adjectives)?
4. Parents, how does it feel to see “Adults” described as (pick two or three of the negative adjectives)?

SAY:

It is clear that the journey of moving from child to teen, to adult is one that is accompanied by very strong feelings and associations. As you think about your B-Mitzvah, or your child’s B-Mitzvah, it may be helpful to keep in mind the various ways that there are both exciting parts and less-exciting part of the move from child to teen. It is okay to have both of these feelings at the same time. And parents, it is ok for you to have both of these feelings as well.

4. Text Study 2: Why 13? (optional)

The next text offers physical, legal, and spiritual ideas from a Jewish source about the special significance of age 13.

SAY:

Now we are going to go into a deeper study of the question, why was age 13 so important in ancient times?

Hundreds of years ago, the b-mitzvah age was based on how the rabbis understood physical maturity. Here is what they wrote about 12- and 13-year olds:

The age of legal responsibility for boys is 13 and for girls is 12. At that age, they are responsible for their actions and liable for punishment.

– Rabbi Asher Ben Yechiel (13th century Spain)

Ask the whole group:

- Do you think that 12- or 13-year olds should be held responsible for their actions? Like, if they lie on a test or steal something or damage property, should they be punished differently from how a child would be punished?
- Are there adults in your life who still believe kids of different genders have different maturity levels? How does that make you feel? Do you think it’s true?

Ask the preteens:

- What do you like about increased responsibility and what don’t you like?
- How has your level of responsibility changed already?

- How do you see it changing in the years ahead?
- What responsibility are you nervous or excited about? What are the responsibilities you take on between age 13 and 18?

SAY:

Becoming a b-mitzvah in Jewish communities often involves the following things: public speaking, wearing a special outfit, wearing a tallit, being counted in a minyan, posing for photographs, doing a mitzvah project, giving tzedakah, hosting a celebration, doing some celebratory dancing, receiving money as a gift, writing thank-you notes, and many other activities.

ASK:

Which of these activities do you think relates strongest to the theme of coming of age—of going from being a child to being a teen or becoming a “young adult”?

Ask one or two students and then one or two adults to respond to this question.

5. Breakout Groups: Parents and Students Separate (20–25 minutes)

SAY:

We are now going to split up into two groups, parents and students, to explore these issues a little further.

Relocate students to one room and adults to another room.

Student Group

Pass out copies of Student Handout 2 and pens/pencils to each participant.

SAY:

You each have a worksheet with two questions on it. The first question has to do with what you are most anxious about regarding your b-mitzvah. Take a moment to read all the phrases below that first question and circle the two that make you the most worried/anxious.

Give participants a few moments to respond to this question. Then **ASK:**

1. What from the list are you most anxious about? (ask students to call out their responses)
2. What do you notice about the trends in the responses?
3. What about what you chose makes you anxious? What might make you less anxious about it?

(Facilitator’s Tip: If you have a large group, you might choose to invite participants to answer this question with a partner)

SAY:

Now take another look at the list; what on there are you most excited or confident about?

Allow students to respond and invite them to “star” the one they are most excited about.

SAY:

The second question we are going to consider today is: ‘What are two Jewish values connected to b-mitzvah that are really important to you? To your parents? To both of you equally?’ Take a look at the whole list and think about which ones would fit into each of the categories on your paper.

Pick two that fit into each category: two that are important to you, two that are important to your parents, and two that you think are important to both of you equally. Write the two values you choose for each under the appropriate spot on your piece of paper.

ASK:

- What is important to you about the values you wrote under “ME?”
- Has there been a time when your values and the values of your parents are at odds? Tell us about the situation...

Facilitator’s Tip: Depending on the size of your group, you might invite participants to answer this question in pairs.

SAY:

There are clearly MANY things you are keeping in mind as you plan for your b-mitzvah. You have some things you value, some things your parents’ value, and then some pieces that you both find important. Still, that’s a lot to manage!

Let’s think about how hard it might be to manage lots of things by playing a game.

Then proceed to either option 1 or option 2, depending on what you think your group will prefer.

Option 1:

After they have all finished picking words or phrases for each category, pass out two balloons per person along with a marker. Have them write one word/phrase from the category “means a lot to me” on one balloon, and one word/phrase from the category “means a lot to my parents” on the other balloon. Then, invite them to blow up the balloons and each play a game of “keep it up” with the two balloons, trying to keep both of their balloons in the air at the same time. You can then transition into a larger game of “keep it up” with everyone in a circle, trying to keep all the balloons in the air at once.

Facilitator’s Tip: If you are concerned with the balloons popping, consider subbing in beach balls for balloons.

ASK:

- What was it like trying to keep all of your balloons up in the air at once?
- What was it like trying to keep everyone's balloons up at once?
- What do you think this game had to do with the b-mitzvah process?

SAY:

Just like how it was tough to keep all the balloons up in the air during the game, it can sometimes feel overwhelming to juggle your family's values and desires for your b-mitzvah process with your own. And it can be frustrating because at your age you don't get to call all the shots. Finding something that means a lot to both you and your parents is a great way of making your b-mitzvah meaningful for both you and your family.

Option 2:

Give each participant four apples and make sure they have a flat surface to work on such as a desk, floor or table.

SAY:

When I say go, you are each going to try and stack all four of your apples into a tower. If they fall, just try again. I will set the clock to 30 seconds

Start your timer and see how many can get all four stacked in that time frame.

ASK:

- What was it like trying to get all of those apples into one stack?
- What do you think this game had to do with the b-mitzvah process?

SAY:

Just like how it was tough to get all those apples stacked, it can sometimes feel overwhelming to include all of your family's values and desires for your b-mitzvah process in addition to your own. It would be so much easier if there were only two apples to stack wouldn't it? And it can be frustrating because you don't get to call all the shots. Finding something that means a lot to both you and your parents is a great way of making your b-mitzvah meaningful for both you and your family.

Parent Group

Have one educator (at least) facilitate a discussion using the following prompts. Keep the conversation moving. If you have a large group of parents, or to just switch things up, you might pick a question and invite people to share with a partner or two for a few minutes before opening up for a larger debrief.

ASK:

1. If you had a coming of age celebration, what helped you on your journey to adulthood? Do you think whatever helped you could help your child? Why/why not?

2. What elements of the b-mitzvah process could help your child on the journey to adulthood?
3. What elements of the b-mitzvah process make you nervous? Excited? Why?
4. What challenges do you anticipate during the b-mitzvah process?

6. Parent/Child Discussion and Closing (10-15 Minutes)

Bring the students back into the room and ask them to sit with their parents.

SAY:

You have been in two different rooms, doing different things. Now it's time to share. Please talk for a few minutes as a family about what is on the student "worksheet." If you would like to separate a little from the other people in the room for privacy, feel free to do so!

ALLOW for 5-7 minutes of conversation and remind everyone when they have one minute left

Ask everyone to move back to their original seats for a larger group conversation.

SAY:

We have explored many different aspects of b-mitzvah today, but I want to end with a focus on the name of this session – Today you are an adult: what does it mean to become a teen?

ASK:

- In what ways is the b-mitzvah process one of becoming an adult? In what ways is it a process of becoming a teen?
- What is one thing that today's discussion got you thinking about?

SAY:

Thank you for participating today and helping us think about the meaning of becoming a teen in our community. Rabbi Ben Zoma would say: 'Who is wise? One who learns from every person.' We hope that these conversations open doors to future conversations and more learning.

I am going to ask each of you to please complete a survey about our time together today. Your feedback is very important to us and to our partner, Moving Traditions. Parents, please take out your phone and text the word MITZVAH to 267-399-5900. This will take you to a survey to answer a few questions. This session was called "Today you are an adult: What does it mean to become a teen?" so when asked, that's the answer! Parents you will fill out the first few questions and then you will be prompted to turn your phone over to your child who will answer the next few questions before hitting submit.

Ask parents to pull out their phones and complete a very short evaluation!

